

## Mayor's Column for January 6, 2010 Review

2009 was an extremely eventful, busy year. Keeping up with changing financial information and economic conditions to understand the impacts on our community, making grant applications for project funding (including stimulus opportunities), spearheading the pilot Energy Independent Community grant program, and monitoring development of a lean city budget in challenging circumstances kept my attention focused on day-to-day activities. Occupied with working on a grant report the last couple of weeks, the final project needing attention before the end of the year, I was caught by surprise that it was also the end of the decade. I just had not been focusing on the larger picture.

I have listened to and read with great interest the recent commentary and analyses of the decade following Y2K. I have seen a number of labels for the decade---the bubble decade, the reality decade, the squandered decade, and the lost decade are some of them. There have been many post-mortem articles on the disputed presidential election, 9/11, Katrina, the housing bubble, the banking crisis, and so on.

A particularly interesting question was posed by U.S. historian Doris Kearns Goodwin during a round-table discussion on last Sunday's television episode of "Meet the Press". She asked, "What would be the game-changing results if a Manhattan Project-style effort to get off dependence on foreign oil had been undertaken by our country?" Tom Brokaw, also a round-table participant, later in the conversation observed that flexibility would be required of government to effectively address problems as we move forward.

Peggy Noonan wrote, in an editorial column of the January 2, 2010 Wall Street Journal, that the last ten years were not the worst of the past century, but were hard. She argues that, "So many great American institutions---institutions that every day hold us together---acted as if they had forgotten their mission, forgotten what they were about, what their role and purpose was, what they existed to do." Public interest gave way to personal gratification. Noonan believes that as citizens we need to take personal responsibility and re-focus on the missions of organizations as we begin addressing our country's many problems and issues.

What really got my attention were comments made by Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts who spoke on "Meet the Press" the Sunday after Christmas. He was most interested in discussing the coming decade. He labeled the next ten years the "decade of innovation". He believes American ingenuity will provide successful problem-solving. He spoke of education as a key to successful innovation.

As I considered Governor Patrick's ideas, comments made by Terry Whipple, the guest speaker at Evansville's Economic Development Summit held two years ago, came to mind. I pulled out my notes from the Summit---Terry stated that 80% of kindergarten students will work in jobs not created today. He also remarked that 70% of items manufactured this year will be obsolete in six years. He then emphasized the importance of education.

Terry spoke of the increasing rate of change and stated “fast eats slow”, emphasizing that adaptability is critical to survival. Terry also explained the concept of “churning rate”, the ability to grasp new opportunities for the future, and Wisconsin’s low rank of 47 out of the 50 states in this measurement.

Here are my thoughts on the role and activities of local government in 2010 and the beginning of a new decade. First, we have to become and remain adaptable to change. Change is here to stay. Flexibility is required to successfully provide services to our residents under a variety of economic/social conditions. We have seen first-hand the complex interrelationships of banks, business, housing, education, and government. Significant loss of interest income played havoc with our city budget. Loss of jobs can lead to loss of tax receipts at the same time social service needs increase. Stress is placed on the education system as job training needs soar. Some communities have suffered loss of population, which can cause erosion of other local institutions. Inaction when faced with serious issues can be devastating. Vigilance and thoughtful, deliberate flexibility is a necessity for city government.

Local government needs to have a clear understanding of its role and purpose. A review of the basic services required by our community will help prioritize community needs as they are matched with scarce dollars. The missions and activities of other community organizations may be impacted through interrelationships among government, business, school and social organizations during the current challenges.

We need to continue to focus attention on energy independence. I watched the increase in crude oil volatility the past few weeks as political unrest unfolded in Iran. Whether or not you believe in climate change, energy independence is critical to our country. We need to free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil. The Evansville Common Council voted unanimously to become the second Energy Independent Community in Wisconsin, recognizing the value of keeping energy dollars in our state, reducing energy costs through conservation and energy efficiency, and decreasing our dependence on foreign oil. Evansville has completed a plan that will accomplish a substantial increase in the use of renewable energy by city government. Increasing use of renewable energy will also reduce pollutants and result in a cleaner environment.

Finally, Evansville needs to encourage innovation. We have a strong entrepreneurial environment in our community that needs to be supported. It is a key to the economic vitality of our community. The need for an organization to encourage innovation was identified at the Evansville Economic Development Summit two years ago. The Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club, formed following the Summit, provides important networking opportunities for fostering ingenuity and creativity. There are a number of school clubs that encourage innovative, entrepreneurial activity such as the Lego Lords Robotics Club and the High Mileage Vehicle Club. Progressive curricula and job training are needed to prepare students and workers for those soon-to-be created jobs. We need to advocate for appropriate skills training and education that reaches workers living in our community.

Our local government is sensitive to the many challenges as well as the opportunities that are present as we begin a new decade. I have confidence in our ability to adjust to change and provide needed services to our residents. In addition, we must participate in conversations about the future direction of our state—the well-being of Evansville will be impacted by state plans and actions. I am hopeful that the next decade is indeed the “decade of innovation”. It means hard work but the benefits can alleviate many of our current challenges.

### Community Announcements

The Chamber of Commerce holiday party will be held on Thursday evening, January 7, 2010, at the Evansville Golf Course Restaurant.

On Friday evening, January 8, E-Arts presents “A Tribute to Elvis” at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at Evansville Pharmacy, Kopecky’s Piggly Wiggly, Shannon Law Office, and the ECP office at 8 West Main Street. This is a great opportunity to support live performance in our community. See you there!

The Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club will hold their rescheduled holiday party on Wednesday, January 13, at 6:30 p.m. in the Eager Economy Building. Bring your enthusiasm, innovative ideas, and curiosity to this vibrant new community organization.

The public is invited to attend a special meeting of the Evansville Historic Preservation Commission on Wednesday, January 13, at 6:30 p.m. in the community room of the Eager Free Public Library. Daina Penkiunas, National Register Coordinator of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and architectural historian Timothy Heggland of Mazomanie will review the individual properties and new Historic Districts in Evansville that are proposed to be nominated to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Leonard-Lake Leota Park, St. John’s Lutheran Church, Almeron Eager Memorial and Eager Family Plot at Maple Hill Cemetery, the Grove Street Historic District, and the South First Street Historic District will be discussed.

A flock of ducks just landed in our front yard on one of the coldest days of the year. The birds can be enticed to travel to the yards of friends and neighbors after pledging support for the Evansville Youth Center. Watch for them in your neighborhood.

### Community Thanks

Our community and I personally thank the members of the Evansville Energy Independence Team for their year-long efforts at developing a plan for our local government to generate/obtain 25% of electricity and transportation fuel from renewable sources by the year 2025. Team members include Dane Albright, Butch Beedle, Steve Carlson, Heidi Carvin, Sandy Decker, Georgia Duerst-Lahti, Scott George, Fred Juergens, John Morning, Alicia Rankin (WPPI Energy), John Rasmussen, Janis Ringhand, Jodi Sam, Dave Wartenweiler, and Kendall Wethal. The Team will continue

to meet regularly to monitor implementation of the plan, identify additional opportunities for energy projects, promote community energy education, and encourage business, school, and residential energy conservation, efficiency and renewable energy activities.